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ABSTRACT

A task force was charged with developing a revised set of guidelines for public library service to children in Vermont. Together with the results of a survey of Vermont public libraries, the help of recommendations from other states, and the expertise of individual libraries, the task force drew up a number of guidelines. In the first section the philosophy and goals of good library service to children are outlined. The next section presents guidelines for staffing children's services, including the qualifications and responsibilities of a children's librarian and information on professional development, scheduling, staffing levels, evaluation, and salaries. Guidelines in the next three sections are concerned with library materials for children, programming, and physical facilities. Concluding the guidelines are a description of the role of the library trustees as it relates to children's services, a copy of the Library Bill of Rights, and an interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights as it pertains to the rights of minors. (MAB)

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Guidelines for Public Library Service to Children in Vermont

Vermont Department
of Libraries
Task Force on
Children's Services

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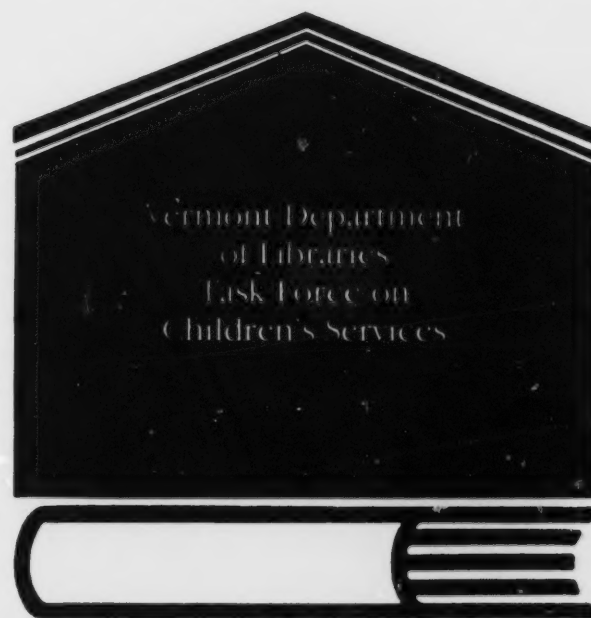
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**Guidelines
for
Public Library
Service
to Children
in Vermont**



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Preface



Almost ten years have passed since the first edition of "Recommendations For Public Library Service To Children in Vermont" was published. In those ten years, much has changed in the library profession, including planning and evaluation methods — the very foundations for this document. Therefore, in order to bring Vermont up-to-date, it was decided to revise the original document. Accordingly, in the fall of 1987 the State Librarian, Patricia Klinck, appointed a Task Force on Children's Services. First, the Task Force drew up a questionnaire on children's services, which was sent to all public libraries in Vermont. Then, over the next few months, with the data from the survey, the help of recommendations from other states, and the expertise of individual librarians, the Task Force drew up new guidelines. The scope of the changes is reflected in the fact that the Task Force decided to formulate "guidelines" rather than "recommendations," recognizing that each community is different. Drafts of these guidelines have been shown, at various times, to the Children's Services Advisory Group (comprised of all Vermont's children's librarians), the staff of the Department of Libraries, all of the public library directors in the state, and children's consultants from other states. After each round of comments, the Task Force made careful revisions.

The final draft of this document was presented to the Board of Libraries on December 12, 1988, and was passed unanimously.

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Introduction

The public library is a tremendously important community resource. It addresses the educational, cultural, informational, and recreational needs of all the people, beginning with those of the youngest patrons. Good public library service for children cultivates a love of reading and books, expands their horizons, and deepens their understanding of themselves and the world around them. But what constitutes good service? How do you evaluate what your library is doing, and how do you plan for change? This document addresses those questions, and gives a framework for planning and evaluating.

The guidelines here are consistent with current library thinking in that they are qualitative rather than quantitative. We recognize that each library is unique, and that each community has different needs. What is appropriate for one would not be appropriate for the next. Therefore, these guidelines define the underlying principles of good children's library service and specific characteristics of such service, but they do not tell how much, how often, or how many.

Children's services are an integral part of public library service, and cannot be examined in isolation. Planning and evaluating children's services should be included in a library's overall planning process. Each library needs to evaluate its own community's needs and resources to establish the nature, scope, and priorities of its services and programs. This document is meant to be used in conjunction with other planning and evaluation tools including the Department of Libraries guidelines, "Minimum Standards for Vermont Public Libraries" and "Envisioning Excellence," and the two A.L.A. publications, *Planning and Role Setting For Public Libraries* and *Output Measures For Public Libraries*.

These guidelines may be used by people in a wide variety of positions. Possible uses include, but are not limited to:

- children's librarians to support requests to library directors and boards for improving services and increasing budgets;
- library directors to develop a long-range plan for children's services, and to support this plan to boards and local officials;
- trustees to deepen their understanding of, and their commitment to, children's services;
- local officials to increase their support of libraries in general and of children's services in particular;

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- citizens to increase their understanding of what constitutes good library service for children;
- the Vermont Library Association to advocate for children's services in the profession and throughout the state.

Each library in Vermont has unique resources and needs. Therefore, each library's implementation of these guidelines will be different. However, the end result — quality service to children — *can* be realized in all communities from the largest city to the smallest village.

Philosophy of Library

Service to Children

Every child from infancy on is entitled to easy access to good public library service. The goals of public library service to children are:

- to introduce children to reading and good literature;
- to provide them with appropriate materials and programs that will satisfy informational and recreational needs;
- to stimulate their imaginations;
- to help them understand themselves and the world they live in;
- to make them lifelong library users.

Providing access to knowledge and good literature broadens the minds of young people and expands their horizons. Positive, enriching library experiences prepare children to contribute to their communities and the world.

To provide good public library service for children, a library must:

1. Plan children's services as part of the library's overall plan, making sure that the needs of the individual community are met.
2. Treat children with respect, and afford them the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as adults. This includes opening the children's department as many hours as the adult department, and providing for children all services, such as interlibrary loan and reserves, that are offered to adults. The principles expressed in the Library Bill of Rights and "Free Access to Libraries For Minors" (appended) should guide library operations.
3. Select and maintain a collection of books and other materials for different ages and interests.
4. Establish preschool services as a top priority. The public library should strive to introduce reading and books to children as early as possible in their lives by providing materials and programs to meet their needs and interests.
5. Plan and implement a variety of programs for school-aged children to excite them about literature and to promote library use.
6. Continually publicize the library's resources and services for children.
7. Provide access and materials to children with special needs.

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8. Inform parents about materials and services for children. Possible means include programs, printed materials, and special collections.
9. Work cooperatively with local school library media centers to provide complete library service for children.
10. Provide children with a smooth transition to the adult collection.
11. Provide outreach services as needed by the community. The public library has the responsibility to reach out to the child isolated by a rural environment, an urban neighborhood, or a handicapping condition.
12. Cooperate with other community agencies that serve children.

Children's Services Staff

A dynamic, caring, knowledgeable librarian can stimulate a child's interest in reading and learning. Every library should have staff responsible for serving the children of the community and adults in their roles as parents or caregivers. Ideally, every library should have a children's librarian, but in smaller libraries, one person may be responsible for providing service to all ages and segments of the community. The following apply in all cases, and the term "children's librarian" is used for anyone with primary responsibility for children's services at a given library.

I. QUALIFICATIONS OF A CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN:

- A. A broad knowledge of children's needs and a genuine caring and respect for children.
- B. Extensive knowledge of children's literature and information resources and materials, and the ability to relate print and nonprint materials to children.
- C. The ability to plan and carry out all aspects of children's programming.
- D. The ability to work well with groups of children and adults.
- E. The ability and desire to promote children's services, both in and out of the library.
- F. The ability to plan, manage, and evaluate services and programs.
- G. Some formal library or child-related training, preferably both. An M.L.S. degree from an A.L.A.-accredited program is preferred; otherwise the children's librarian should have a bachelor's degree and hold or work towards a Vermont public library certificate.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN ARE TO:

- A. Serve as part of the library's management team to assure communication and coordination with library administration and other staff.
- B. Develop goals and objectives for children's services as part of the overall library plan.
- C. Manage the operation of the children's area including:
 - developing a budget for children's services as part of the library's overall budget;
 - selecting staff and volunteers in consultation with the administration;
 - training, supervising, and evaluating staff and volunteers;



- writing a policy and procedures manual for the children's area in consultation with the library director;
 - collecting and interpreting appropriate statistics;
 - continually evaluating services and programs to determine if they are meeting the needs of the community and fulfilling the library's overall mission.
- D. Select, evaluate, and weed children's materials in accordance with the library's policies.
- E. Provide reference and reader's advisory service.
- F. Help parents and other caregivers select materials to use with children, and show them how to encourage their children's use of the library and enjoyment of books.
- G. Plan, publicize, implement, and evaluate programs for children.
- H. Promote and publicize children's services within the library and to the community.
- I. Work cooperatively with area schools. Cooperation should include regular meetings with school personnel. Other possibilities include: a cooperative purchase arrangement, deposit collections, and shared programs.
- J. Establish sound working relationships with other community agencies serving children.
- K. Utilize the services provided by the Vermont Department of Libraries.
- L. Seek supplementary funding, working with the administration, to increase or improve library services to children. Sources may include but should not be limited to:
- grants from federal, state, or local governments or private foundations;
 - contributions from Friends of the Library;
 - community organizations or local businesses.

III. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Every librarian has an obligation to keep abreast of trends and developments in the field by reading professional literature and sharing information with colleagues. In addition, the children's librarian should:

- A. Take courses or workshops regularly to update or increase skills or knowledge.
- B. Belong to and participate in the Vermont Library Association and

its children's section, CAYAL. Membership in related library-or child-oriented organizations, such as the New England Library Association or the American Library Association, is also useful. The library is encouraged to pay membership dues at least for the Vermont Library Association.

- C. Attend meetings and conferences (especially the annual conference of the Vermont Library Association). Time spent at meetings should be paid library time. The local library is also encouraged to pay for expenses for these meetings, including registration, food, lodging, and transportation.

IV. SCHEDULING

Time should be allotted weekly for "behind the scenes" duties such as developing goals and objectives, selecting children's materials, planning programs, and designing and setting up displays. This requires some paid time when direct service is provided by other staff, or when the library is closed.

V. LEVELS OF STAFF

A library's overall plan will guide its staffing patterns. However, general experience offers the following suggestions:

- A library serving a population of 3,000 or more should consider assigning a specific staff member to be responsible for children's services. Clerical assistance should also be provided this person.
- A community of 5,000 or more should almost always have a children's librarian, and one of over 10,000 will probably find a children's services staff necessary.

VI. EVALUATION

Each staff person's performance should be evaluated annually. The evaluation should be based on:

- A. The job description for the position.
- B. Goals and objectives established yearly by the employee and the supervisor.

VII. SALARIES

Adequate salaries are important, not only in order to attract and keep good people, but also to establish and maintain community respect for the library and its staff. Appropriate salary levels depend on education, experience, and responsibility. Wages should be comparable to those of other municipal employees and/or professional school personnel of similar experience and responsibility.

Materials

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The children's collection should provide a wide spectrum of print and nonprint materials to meet the educational, informational, cultural, and recreational needs of the children in the community. Materials should be carefully selected so that the collection challenges, inspires, and fosters a love of reading and learning.

I. COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

- A. The library's general policy should include a written selection policy covering children's materials.
- B. The children's librarian should direct the selection of all children's materials.
- C. Selection practice should include the use of review media and other critical aids.
- D. The collection must be continually re-evaluated to keep it current and attractive. The librarian should:
 - regularly consult basic recommended bibliographies such as CHILDREN'S CATALOG for assistance in weeding and selecting;
 - discard worn-out, out-of-date, inaccurate, and no longer popular titles;
 - duplicate popular titles when possible;
 - identify weak areas, and select materials accordingly.
- E. The public library collection should complement, but not take the place of, the local school libraries. In cases where the public library also functions as the school library, additional funding should be appropriated from the school or town budget.

II. BUDGET

The library should budget funds annually for children's materials.

- A. The amount allocated for the children's collection will vary depending on the library and community, but a basic guideline is approximately 30% of the materials budget. Factors to be considered in planning a budget include, but are not limited to:
 - the percentage of children in the total population;
 - the percentage of the total circulation generated by children's materials;
- B. A portion of the children's budget (usually 10 — 20%) should be spent for replacements and for strengthening the basic collection.

III. TYPES OF MATERIALS

The collection should include a wide variety of materials for all ages and reading levels.

- A. The first priority should be the creation and maintenance of an attractive book collection which includes both current and classic children's books.
- B. The collection should include reference books appropriate for children.
- C. A well-rounded children's collection contains many formats besides books. Possible formats include, but are not limited to:
 - periodicals
 - pamphlets
 - pictures
 - audiorecordings
 - videocassettes
 - educational toys and games
 - filmstrips
 - computer software

IV. ACCESS TO MATERIALS

- A. The entire collection of the library should be accessible to children.
- B. Libraries should supplement their children's collections with materials from the regional libraries as needed.
- C. Children's materials not available locally should be requested through the interlibrary loan network.
- D. The librarian should be aware of and use special services and resources for special-needs children.

Programming



Programming is an essential service that addresses the cultural, educational, recreational, and informational needs of the community. Programs excite children about literature, promote library use, attract non-users, increase materials circulation, and help make the library a focal point of the community.

I. FUNDING AND STAFFING

Library programming for children should be adequately funded and supported.

- A. The library budget should include funds for programs.
- B. Paid library time should be scheduled for program preparation, publicity, implementation, and evaluation.
- C. The children's librarian should oversee the general plan for all programs, but volunteers may assist in programming. The librarian should see that volunteers are adequately trained and prepared for programming.

II. SCOPE OF PROGRAMS

Programs should be planned and implemented for children of all ages, including those with special needs.

- A. The library should establish a written policy for programming which outlines the library's philosophy.
- B. Programs should fit into a library's overall goals and objectives. Program possibilities include but are not limited to: storytelling, book talks, craft/art programs, book discussion groups, summer programs, audio-visual programs, class visits, seasonal programs, family programs, speakers, and performers.
- C. Ongoing preschool programming should be a high priority for every library.
- D. The library should offer programs for school-aged children throughout the year, but should particularly target vacations and the summer.
- E. Programs specifically designed for parents and adults working with children should be offered.

III. COOPERATIVE PROGRAMMING

Libraries should cooperate with neighboring libraries and/or other agencies in the community to plan, carry out, and publicize library-related programs for children.

- A. Continuous communication and cooperation between the public library and schools, day care centers, and other community agencies (recreation departments, 4H groups, hospitals, churches, Boy and Girl Scouts, etc.) are necessary for effective programming.
- B. Outreach programs to schools, day care centers, and other community organizations are essential to attract new users to the library and to reach non-users.
- C. Co-sponsorship of programs with other agencies or neighboring libraries is desirable to reach more children and to pool resources and expertise.

IV. EVALUATION

The effectiveness of programs should be continually evaluated.

- A. Statistics on attendance, number and types of programs, preparation time, cost, and the target versus actual audience should be kept.
- B. Analysis of statistics will provide justification for staffing, scheduling, and budget requirements.
- C. Program evaluation should also be used to determine how well the goals and objectives are being met, and to adjust programming accordingly.

Physical Facilities

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The children's area should be attractive, accessible, and functional. A well-designed, inviting space will make children feel welcome and comfortable.

I. SPACE

Every library should have a designated space for children, preferably a separate room or an area separate and distinct from the general reading area.

II. ARRANGEMENT

The space within the children's area should be flexible enough to accommodate various purposes and users of all ages. When planning a children's area, consider the various activities that may occur, including browsing, reading, studying, listening, participating in programs, and creating.

Children's space may include:

- A. A preschool picture book area with carpeting and a comfortable chair where preschoolers and adults can share picture books aloud and where preschoolers can play a game or look at books alone.
- B. An informal reading area with comfortable seating where children can read, talk, and browse.
- C. A quiet study area with tables or carrels for doing homework.
- D. An open space (perhaps created by moving furnishings) or a separate room for programming.
- E. Tables for art and craft activities.
- F. Facilities for listening to tapes or records.
- G. Facilities for using computers.

III. SHELVING AND COLLECTION ARRANGEMENT

- A. Shelves should be adjustable and of suitable height and depth to accommodate children's materials of various sizes. When planning shelving, consider:
 - the size of the patrons. Shelving for children should not be more than 5' high for books for older children, or 42" for picture books;

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- the types of materials to be housed;
 - alternatives to shelves such as bins, racks, and other storage equipment.
- B. Materials should not be separated by age level except for picture books, easy readers, and young adult materials.
- the purpose of the collection;
 - how current the collection is;
 - how closely the collection meets the goals and objectives for children's services.

IV. APPEARANCE

The children's area should be inviting and appealing. It needs:

- A. Bright colors, attractive furniture, and good lighting.
- B. Continually changing exhibits and displays.
- C. Attractive directional and informational signs which are consistent in style, color, and tone.

V. SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The children's area should be safe and physically accessible to all users.

- A. Visibility and ease of supervision should be prime considerations in designing this area.
- B. Whenever possible, the children's section should be on the first floor of the library building.
- C. The children's area should be accessible to handicapped people.
- D. Racks, shelving, and storage units should be sturdy and safe to use.
- E. Safe entrances and exits must be provided.
- F. Stairways, balconies, or railings should be designed or modified to ensure safety.
- G. There should be a bathroom accessible to all children.

VI. USER SERVICES

The circulation desk and card catalog should be easily accessible to children.

- A. For circulation, a standard desk height of 30" is appropriate; up to 42" high is suitable for the card catalog.
- B. If one circulation desk and card catalog are used for the entire library, provisions should be made for children by having either a step stool to stand on, or a lower addition to the circulation desk.

VII. RELATIONSHIP TO THE REST OF THE LIBRARY

The children's area should be easily accessible to the rest of the library

- A. Children should feel comfortable using the adult and young adult collections when needed.
- B. If there is a separate children's room, it should have a telephone.
- C. If possible, there should be a staff work area convenient to the children's room.

Role of Trustees as

Related to Children's Services

Trustees are responsible for the provision of library service to the total community. Library planning and policymaking should address the quality and level of children's services to be provided. The budget and staffing should reflect priorities determined through careful self-study.

Trustees can do much to support the library's program of service to children, specifically in the areas of staffing, budgeting, materials selection, policy development, and physical environment. Ongoing evaluation of library service should include children's services. Community feedback is essential, and trustees, as representatives of the community, are valuable sounding boards.

Furthermore, trustees are vital in promoting children's services and programs throughout the community. They should seize any and all opportunities to speak formally and informally about the library to community members who would like to see the library offer.

While the library director usually is the staff's link to the board of trustees, the children's librarian and other staff should be encouraged to participate in board discussions concerning their particular areas of responsibility. The children's librarian should be viewed as the board's, the library's, and the community's specialist in the area of public library service to children.

Library Bill of Rights

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The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

1. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

2. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

3. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

4. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

5. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

6. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 18, 1948. Amended February 2, 1961, June 27, 1967, and January 23, 1980, by the ALA Council.

Free Access to Libraries

For Minors

An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

Some library procedures and practices effectively deny minors access to certain services and materials available to adults. Such procedures and practices are not in accord with the Library Bill of Rights and are opposed by the American Library Association.

Restrictions take a variety of forms, including, among others, restricted reading rooms for adult use only, library cards limiting circulation of some materials to adults only, closed collections for adult use only, collections limited to teacher use, or restricted according to a student's grade level, and interlibrary loan service for adult use only.

Article 5 of the Library Bill of Rights states that, "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views." All limitations on minors' access to library materials and services violate that article. The "right to use a library" includes use of, and access to, all library materials and services. Thus, practices which allow adults to use some services and materials which are denied to minors abridge the use of libraries based on age.

Material selection decisions are often made and restrictions are often initiated under the assumption that certain materials may be "harmful" to minors, or in an effort to avoid controversy with parents. Libraries or library boards which would restrict the access of minors to materials and services because of actual or suspected parental objections should bear in mind that they do not serve in loco parentis. Varied levels of intellectual development among young people and differing family background and child-rearing philosophies are significant factors not accommodated by a uniform policy based upon age.

In today's world, children are exposed to adult life much earlier than in the past. They read materials and view a variety of media on the adult level at home and elsewhere. Current emphasis upon early childhood education has also increased opportunities for young people to learn and to have access to materials, and has decreased the validity of using chronological age as an index to the use of libraries. The period of time during which children are interested in reading materials specifically designed for them grows steadily shorter, and librarians must recognize and adjust to this change if they wish to serve young people effectively. Librarians have a responsibility to ensure that young people have access to a wide range of informational and recreational materials and services that reflects sufficient diversity to meet the young person's needs.

The American Library Association opposes libraries restricting access to library materials and services for minors and holds that it is the parents — and only parents — who may restrict their children — and only their children — from access to library materials and services. Parents who would rather their children did not have access to certain materials should so advise their children. The library and its staff are responsible for providing equal access to library materials and services for all library users.

The word "age" was incorporated into article 5 of the Library Bill of Rights because young people are entitled to the same access to libraries and to the materials in libraries as are adults. Materials selection should not be diluted on that account.

Adopted June 30, 1972; amended July 1, 1981, by the ALA Council.

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